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ABSTRACT

This lesson requires attention to the composition and design elements essential to decoration of a curved surface. Skills taught are the techniques and processes of ceramic glazing and underglazing. Supplies required include commercially-made terra cotta flower pots, glazes, and a kiln. The plan includes lesson goals and objectives; background preparation; a glossary of terms; a list of supplies; and instructions and suggestions for lesson implementation. Additional suggestions provide technical tips on working with glazes. Follow-up ideas encourage production of decorated pots as a school or program fundraiser. (MM)

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AMACO®

Lesson #6

A Passion For Pots

A Lesson in Glaze Decoration for Students of All Ages

Students of any age will enjoy and benefit from the experience of glaze decorating commercially made terra cotta flower pots. With the flower pots as their canvas, students can experiment and create to the limits of their imaginations and their creativity. The history of functional ceramics goes back to earliest man, and glaze decoration dates back to the Egyptians in 3000 B.C. Over the centuries, in an effort to balance art and craft, functional and decorative, ceramic artists have discovered that glazes and underglazes, when properly formulated, can be painted onto a clay surface with the same great precision and offer the same unlimited potential for elaborate color effects as oil paints and acrylics offer the painter. The elaborate designs and scenes found on pottery created in Spain and Italy during the Renaissance and Baroque periods known as majolica ware are among the best examples of the complex imagery and patterning that can be created on a clay surface.

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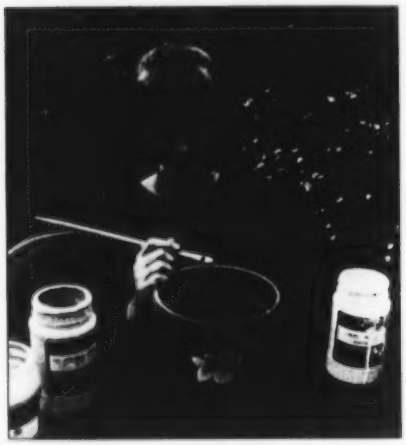
Lesson Goals and Objectives:

1. Students will glaze decorate commercially made terra cotta flower pot.

2. The lesson will incorporate art history, aesthetics, and criticism with a hands on activity.

3. The lesson will focus on important composition and design elements essential to working on a curved surface, color theory, painting technique, and fundamental technical skills for underglazing and glazing, as well as self expression.



Background and Preparation:

1. This project was originally created for fifth and sixth grade students, but can be adapted for use with students on all levels from lower elementary to high school.

2. The art teacher should introduce an historical overview of crafts and decorative arts, focusing on ceramics' rich tradition for complex, stylized imagery. Examples of all types of functional pottery should be shown, from ancient to contemporary, from earthenware to porcelain, from handmade to manufactured. Various vessel forms should also be shown. A special emphasis should be put on majolica ware and how this technique, developed in the Middle Ages and refined in the Renaissance, is still being explored by contemporary ceramic artists.

3. Talk to students about the intricacies of working in the round. Discuss color theory and how it applies to glazes and glaze combinations, positive and negative space, and elements of design.

4. For students without previous ceramic experience, provide them with a brief explanation of the equipment, materials, process, and techniques employed when working with clay and glazes.

5. Create several decorated terra cotta pots, showing a variety of techniques, as examples for your students.

Glossary:

Bisque - clay that has been fired once at a low temperature; unglazed, fired pieces of clay. Also is used as a verb.

Ceramics - the art of making objects of clay which are hardened by firing at a high temperature in a kiln.

Craft - an occupation or pursuit that requires artistic skill.

Craftsmanship - the creating of work of consistently high quality.

Fire - a term used in ceramics; to heat the clay in a kiln at a very high temperature until it is dry and hard and becomes pottery.

Functional - designed or created primarily for use.

Glaze - a special clear or colored liquid mixture that is applied to pottery and becomes a hard glass surface when fired to the right temperature in a kiln.

Kiln - an oven or furnace that reaches very high temperatures (2000°F to 2300°F) and is used for drying, firing, and glazing ceramic ware.

Majolica - a type of elaborately decorated pottery developed in the Middle Ages and refined in the Renaissance. White tin glazed earthenware was painted and decorated with stains and oxides. This traditional majolica process is still being explored by artists today, however it can be reproduced using safe contemporary materials.

Terra Cotta - Italian, for "baked earth." A hard, fired clay that is usually a brownish red. It has been used since ancient times for sculpture and pottery, and later for architectural decoration.

Underglaze - a special type of color that is usually put on a ceramic piece before the glaze. It has no flux (glass former) in it so it stays in place when fired and is good for detail work. It is used for painting and decorating ceramic pieces.

Vessel - a hollow form that can be used to hold something, i.e., liquid.

Supplies:

- Terra Cotta Flower Pots – 7" or 8" diameter is recommended
- AMACO®/Reward® Liquid Underglazes – Assorted colors
- AMACO®/Reward® Velvet Underglazes – Assorted colors
- AMACO® Low Fire Clear Transparent Glaze, Lead Free (LG-10)
- AMACO® Low Fire Opaque White Glaze, Lead Free (LG-11)
- AMACO® Decorating Wheels
- Brushes – various sizes for small detail to large coverage
- Sponges
- Newspapers (to protect table surface)
- Sketch paper (to plan designs)
- Pencils

Instructions:

1. Purchase an appropriate quantity of ready-made, bisque-fired terra cotta pots from a garden supply store. Be sure the pots you use have no cracks or chips. 7" or 8" flower pots are a good size because they provide a large enough surface on which to work. However, terra cotta flower pots are available in a variety of sizes, and any size can be used.

2. The pots should be fired once to cone 04 before decorating. This will thoroughly clean the surface of any oils or grease. The preliminary firing also makes the pots more vitreous.

3. One suggested method for decorating: Paint and draw with liquid underglazes, Velvets, underglaze crayons, and underglaze pencils on the bisque pot. Fire a second time in kiln to cone 04. Glaze with three coats of a clear, low fire glaze and fire a third

time to cone 04. Be sure the glaze is applied to the inside of the pot only as far down as the lip (approximately one inch). This creates a more finished, professional appearance, but does not destroy the necessary porosity of the flower pot.

5. Another suggested method for decorating: Glaze bisque pot with three or four coats of a low fire white gloss glaze. Once again, be sure the glaze is applied to the inside of the pot only as far down as the lip. Do not fire the pot at this point. Paint and draw designs on the unfired glazed pot with liquid underglazes and Velvets to create a majolica effect. Now fire pot for a second time to cone 04.

6. Do not underfire the glazes. Low fire lead free glazes require firing to a high cone 05 to cone 04 to insure the maturity of the glazes.

Additional Suggestions:

1. Encourage self-expression, allowing students the freedom to create real or abstract scenes or designs. Both geometric and free form designs are very effective on the pots.

2. Urge students to plan their drawings or designs, making a preliminary on a piece of paper and then sketching the design directly on the pot with a pencil. Pencil marks on the bisque pot will fire away in the second firing.

3. Be sure students use decorating or banding wheels. This allows the student to work on all sides of the flower pot without having to touch it constantly to move it, avoiding smeared glazes and oily fingerprints.

4. If students are creating designs and not scenes, suggest that they place

the pots upside down on the decorating wheel. An upside down pot with a wide bottom/small top slant is sturdier and easier to decorate than the small bottom/wide top slant of an upright pot.

5. For students unsure of their artistic abilities, sponge painting on flower pots makes very colorful and creative designs. Liquid underglazes and Velvets create true colors and do not mix once applied properly. Starting with darker colors first, apply glaze with a clean, damp sponge, thoroughly covering the outside of the pot with the first color. Allow each coat to dry completely before applying a second color.

6. Be sure that no glaze gets on the bottom of the pots. Glaze on the bottom of the pots will cause the pots to adhere to the kiln shelves in firing. If necessary, use stilts.

Follow Up Ideas:

Glaze decorated flower pots make wonderful gifts for Christmas, Hanukkah, Mother's Day, or Teacher Recognition Day. As an art club or school fund raiser, glazed decorated flower pots are also ideal. Contact local garden supply stores for donations or discount on a quantity of terra cotta flower pots. Students, working after school, can create a good number of these pots in a relatively short period of time. Arrange for students to set up a booth to sell the pots at your school's country fair or at an open house or other all-school function for students, faculty, and parents. Or take orders for sales to parents and faculty. Work with the classroom teacher or science teacher to put plants in the pots for a more complete gift or item to sell. Display decorated flower pots filled with beautiful green indoor plants throughout the school – on the secretary's desk, the principal's office, teachers' rooms. Not only will they add a bright and distinctive touch to the school, parents and teachers will develop a passion for pots and plead with you to have the students make more.

Examples of decorated terra cotta flower pots are by students at Orchard Country Day School, Indianapolis, Indiana, Gail Emerich, Art Teacher.

This is one lesson in a series of art plans for elementary and secondary programs using American Art Clay Co., Inc. products. Successful lessons will be considered for future publication. Send your ideas and slides to David Gamble, National Marketing Director, American Art Clay Co., Inc.

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